

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 005619

SIPDIS

SOUTHCOM FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/13/2020

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KJUS](#) [PHUM](#) [CO](#) [AUC](#)

SUBJECT: OBSERVATIONS REGARDING PARAMILITARY INFLUENCE OVER CONGRESS

REF: BOGOTA 4467

Classified By: Charge Milton K. Drucker, Reasons: 1.4 B & D.

1. (C) Summary: During the week of June 6, the press focused on the long-standing rumor that 30-35 percent of Congress is beholden to the paramilitaries. Our best and, in our estimation, "cleanest" Congressional interlocutors believe that figure is roughly on the mark. Overt support for the AUC is expressed by only a handful of members of Congress (MOCs). However, a larger number take the line that the AUC played a major role in filling the public security void left by the GOC for nearly two decades. Larger still is the group of MOCs from AUC-dominated areas motivated by fear and intimidation. While there is widespread support in the Congress for the bilateral extradition relationship, some members continue to believe that a genuine peace process with the AUC cannot be attained without the GOC (and, clearly, the USG) ceding some ground on extradition. End Summary.

2. (U) Vicente Castano, brother of the disappeared Carlos Castano, rekindled national debate the week of June 6 by stating in a press interview that the AUC controlled roughly 35 percent of the Colombian Congress. Fellow AUC member Salvatorre Mancuso had started a similar rumor in late 2002. President Uribe immediately challenged Castano's assertion, and called on the AUC to reveal names and the Prosecutor General (Fiscal) to charge the implicated.

3. (C) The issue is complicated and nuanced and it is difficult to provide a numerical breakdown. We estimate the House to be more problematic than the Senate. Overall, three general "categories" of MOCs can be identified and described. A first group is a handful of MOCs who openly and repeatedly support the AUC, and are willing to expose themselves on the floor of either house of Congress and in the media. The most prominent of this group are Senator Carlos Moreno de Caro and Representatives Rocio Arias Hoyos and Eleonora Pineda Arcia. They greeted and escorted AUC leaders when they addressed the Congress in July 2004. They are believed to receive funding from the AUC and reportedly meet with AUC members often.

4. (C) A second group is larger, and can be described as those sympathetic to the AUC on the grounds that the paramilitaries "did a service to the nation" by battling the FARC and/or ELN in the absence of GOC public security forces. Emboffs have been repeatedly fed such a line by numerous MOCs. Often the comments are along the lines of "you gringos don't understand - the AUC will never fully dismantle and respect the peace process unless extradition is negotiated in its favor." While we have detected widespread support for the bilateral extradition relationship in the Congress as it applies to obvious drug traffickers, the issue is more divisive when applied to paramilitaries (who in general also traffic in illicit narcotics).

5. (C) A final group, probably the largest of the three, includes MOCs from AUC-dominated areas in which fear and intimidation are motivating factors. MOCs from the departments of Antioquia, Cordoba, Sucre, Magdalena, Bolivar, and La Guajira are found in this group. Even prominent MOCs from Bogota, like Reps. Armando Benedetti, Gina Parody, and Telesforo Pedraza -- all outspoken on the Justice and Peace bill and GOC dealings with the AUC -- have told us privately that it is fairly easy for them to speak out against the AUC from the relative safety of Bogota. It is not the same, they continue, for MOCs from AUC-controlled areas, where the level of intimidation and permeation of department and municipal entities is considerable. There are indications, for example, the AUC had a role in the March 2005 assassination of a member of the House from Caldas Department, and AUC leader "Don Berna" is accused of having a local legislator killed in Cordoba Department weeks ago.

6. (C) A near-term area of concern is upcoming elections for Congress in March 2006. Many incumbent MOCs believe their reelection in the March 2006 elections depends on how much patronage and/or benefits they obtained for districts or persons that support them or financial backing from a major benefactor. The GOC under Uribe has fought against providing such benefits or patronage in many cases, and strongly resists supporting MOCs on both grounds. Uribe's refusal to supply benefits to MOCs who have supported him leaves them

vulnerable to competitors with better funded political campaigns. Given the AUC's ability to fund campaigns or encourage others to do so, AUC support may be important for many MOCs.

17. (C) The Uribe Administration's failure to do more to support friendly MOCs may now be painful. The implications for Congressional action on legislation are obvious and cannot be ignored as Uribe considers how to get support for bills he desires. And since legislators are now elected from well-defined constituencies (see reftel), the need for campaign funding is relatively large and the sources diffuse. "AUC legislators" with good funding may come out of the March 2006 elections even stronger.
DRUCKER